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Expeditionary Medical Facility Bethesda's Reserve Unit Conducts Training Using Army Simulators

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By Cmdr. Michael Vener, naval reserve unit, Expeditionary Medical Facility Bethesda



Sailors wore special backpacks and helmets that allowed them to see and hear everything in a virtual environment, including other squad members.

Expeditionary Medical Facility (EMF) Bethesda's naval reserve unit, held a field training exercise and mass casualty drill with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania this past spring.

The joint exercise called Fort Indiantown Gap Medical Exercise (FIGMEDEX3) was designed to practice operating as adaptive small teams and provide hands-on application of field and medical skills. A total of 33 officers and 38 enlisted personnel from seventeen EMF Bethesda detachments participated in the exercise, including nurses, doctors, and corpsmen from emergency medicine, general surgery, advanced trauma surgical, intensive care, acute care, and post-anesthesia care unit support teams.

Pennsylvania Army National Guard's medical battalion training station instructors conducted the training using Army training simulators: Virtual Battlespace 3 (VBS3), Dismounted Soldier Training Simulator (DSTS), and the Engagement Skills Trainer (EST 2000).



Pennsylvania Army National Guard's medical battalion training station instructors conducted the training using Army simulators.

Training topics went beyond normal medical skills and included triage, tactical combat casualty care skills, ground and air litter evacuation, M4 weapons familiarization, small squad tactics, and 9-line communication skills. The simulators created a broader, more modern, immersive style of training that provided a high level of realism.

In the VBS3, participants learned triage skills and were able to immediately practice triaging casualties in a virtual, video game type of setting, created specifically for EMF Bethesda. The M4 trainers in the EST 2000 had the identical feel, weight, recoil, fit and sound of actual M4s. It provided excellent weapon familiarization and a way to practice basic rifle marksmanship with minimal cost, a skill most reserve Sailors rarely get a chance to exercise.



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The most popular training evolution was in the DSTS. Triage, squad tactics, weapons skills and 9-line skills were combined in the trainer. Small medical squads were required to secure and evacuate casualties, while under fire, in a virtual reality Afghani village. Sailors wore special backpacks and helmets that allowed them to see and hear everything in a virtual environment, including other squad members. They communicated using a helmet-mounted display with a headphone/microphone set. The virtual environment was completely interactive and could be changed as needed to suit individual training needs of the squads, an instantaneous Call of Duty on steroids, so to speak.



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The exercise culminated in a joint, mass casualty exercise with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, with everybody using the full range of skills they learned. EMF Bethesda was given a scenario of receiving multiple casualties from an improvised explosive device attack on a nearby convoy. EMF Bethesda was tasked with sending a small, dismounted quick-reaction force into a hostile environment to secure and MEDEVAC casualties to a battalion aid station, where remaining medical staff provided further care and evacuation as needed.



EMF Bethesda was given a scenario of receiving multiple casualties from an improvised explosive device attack on a nearby convoy.

The MEDEVAC consisted of ground ambulance transportation and air transportation utilizing a Black Hawk helicopter simulator; each had to be radioed in using a 9-line request. The exercise provided invaluable experience and comradery, for EMF Bethesda and the Pennsylvania Army National Guard.

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